

CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
Point of Cape Hatteras,  
access road from Rt. 12  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
Buxton  
Dare County  
North Carolina

HABS NO. NC-357-A

HABS  
NC,  
28-BUXT,  
1-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE, DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A

Location: Point of Cape Hatteras, access from Rt. 12, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Buxton, Dare County, North Carolina

Present Owner: National Park Service, under the direction of the Superintendent of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Rt. 1, Box 675, Manteo, North Carolina

Present Occupant: National Park Service

Present Use: Used as a museum and interpretive center for Cape Hatteras, and the Lighthouse and associated structures, NPS offices, library and gift shop. This is an interpreted site open to tourists.

Significance: The Double Keeper's Dwelling is significant as an existing example of the type of quarters erected for the lighthouse keepers during the mid-19th century. It is the oldest of two keeper's dwellings on site. It was built in 1854, following the heightening of the original 1803 lighthouse tower, and the installation of the Fresnel Lens. As an integral part of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse site, it conveys a sense of the lifestyle and history of lighthouse keepers.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: The original portion was erected in 1854, according to the Annual Reports of the Lighthouse Board. It was part of an extensive refurbishing of the site, when the light tower was extended and a new, First Order Fresnel Lens was installed to replace the old reflecting illuminating apparatus. The keeper's house was enlarged in 1892, according to the Annual Reports.

2. Architect: The actual architect/delineator is unknown. All lighthouses and related structures of this period were designed to federal (Lighthouse Board) standards under the direction of regional districts engineers; in this case, the 5th district headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland.

CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A (page 2)

3. Original and subsequent owners: A four acre lot was purchased by the United States of America from William Jennett et al in February 1801 to which was later added approximately 40 acres adjoining, purchased from Pharoah Farrow in 1820. Since that time it has always been the property of the Federal Government, under the direction of various agencies responsible for aids to navigation. It came under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service in 1935, where it remains.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The keeper's house was built under the direction of the Lighthouse Board at the time that the original tower was raised. The actual work was presumably undertaken through contract, perhaps even by locals, but the actual builders, etc. are unknown.

5. Original plans and construction: The original section of the quarters, a single-family keeper's residence, was built in 1854 according to the Annual Reports of the Light-house Board.

6. Alterations and additions: In 1892, the structure was extensively enlarged to create a double dwelling. According to the Annual Report, "One of the kitchens forming the wings of the assistant keeper's dwelling was moved to the rear, and changes were made to adapt it to the use of two families. The main building was extended on its front and back lines about 16 feet; the inclosure constituted an addition of 16 feet by 20 feet 3 inches in plan and two stories in height."

B. Historical Context:

The keeper's dwelling is an integral part of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse site. It conveys information regarding the light and how it was operated. The primary purpose of the lighthouse was to guide ships through treacherous waters, seemingly by the mere shining of a light. This, however, demanded the support of a full-time keeper and family. The keeper required a dwelling house (or two if there was more than one keeper, as at Hatteras), a privy, a well and cistern, storehouses, a plot for a garden to supplement the food supply, fencing, etc. The lighthouse, in addition to the structure itself, required an oil house, shed, and generally a separate fog horn structure. Thus, a whole complex developed around the lighthouse, necessary to its maintenance.

CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A (page 3)

There was also far more involved in sustaining the light than merely lighting the lamp when the sun when down. This is evidenced by the fact that Hatteras required three keepers. However, once the automation of lighthouses was initiated in the 1930s a whole complex of buildings necessary to support the keepers, and thus the emission of the light, could be replaced by a skeletal frame and electric light. Therefore, a depiction of this way of life, through the existence and interpretation of the keeper's house helps to understand the significance of advancements in lighthouse and lens technology.

This dwelling was the first of the two keeper's houses currently on site at Cape Hatteras. This dwelling though the oldest on the site was actually the third one built to house the keeper of the light. The first dwelling was built at the time that the original tower was initially erected. By 1827 it was said to be in deteriorating condition and was replaced in 1828. The current dwelling was part of a massive overhaul of the site which included the raising of the tower and the installation of the Fresnel lens, and the construction of a new keeper's dwelling in 1854. By then, an assistant keeper had been assigned to the Hatteras Lighthouse as well. Thus, the new dwelling was to be a double quarters. This dwelling, in time, also proved inadequate; quarters were evidently cramped. Therefore, in 1870, during the construction of the new lighthouse, surplus materials were used to erect a new principal keeper's dwelling; and this, the old dwelling, remained the residence of the assistant keeper.

The work of the keeper was strictly regimented. The light was lit at sunset and extinguished at sunrise, but had to be watched constantly throughout the night. The glass chimneys over the lights and the wicks were to be changed every four hours. Because the keepers could not risk allowing the light to go out during the night (especially at Hatteras) there was often more than one keeper at a lighthouse. The keepers would thus take four hour shifts through the night. During the day the keepers meticulously cleaned the lamps, chimneys and mechanisms of the light, checking each part carefully. The oil had to be replenished from the oil house, and new wicks put in. The cleaning of the lighthouse was done daily, polishing and sweeping, and occasionally painting and whitewashing. Strict records had to be keep on supplies, as well as the activities of the day, and reports sent (Instructions to Lighthouse and Lightship Keepers).

CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A (page 4)

In addition to the many duties of the keepers, low pay and often isolated locations added hardship to the life of the keepers and their families. The keepers were given rations of certain staple foodstuffs but most depended on seafood they caught themselves and vegetables raised in their own gardens. For additional supplies keepers and/or family members often had to travel distances from isolated lighthouse sites to get to markets in nearby towns. Although often romanticized, the life of a lighthouse keeper was usually, on the contrary, demanding and lonely.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Double Keeper's House is a vernacular, Georgian-influenced dwelling forming a long I-house structure, eight bays long. It is of frame construction, two stories high. Basically void of ornamentation, it is clean and neat as a keeper's dwelling should be (according to the instructions to keepers). It has a porch which runs the length of the front facade which, because it is a double quarters, has two entries. Its styling most resembles that of Georgian architecture although it does not exhibit the symmetry typical of that style (unless taken as two separate residences).

2. Condition of the fabric: The building has been well maintained and is in good condition, although adaption for an interpretive center may have compromised its interior integrity, the exterior appears true to form.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This is a two-story, one-room-deep I-house, eight bays across. There are single story attachments to the rear.

2. Foundations: The house rests on brick piers.

3. Walls: The walls are of wooden siding with cornerboards.

4. Porches, stoops: A shed roof porch runs the length of the front elevation. It is supported by squared posts with a balustrade in an X-pattern. There is a small,

CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A (page 5)

shed roof porch to the rear, providing a breezeway between the main house and a rear addition (where the library is housed).

5. Chimneys: The house has two interior brick chimneys with corbelled caps. One is at the west gable end and the other is east of center along the roof ridge.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are two entries at the south front elevation. Moving west to east, they are the third and eighth bays. They have simple architrave surrounds. There are entries to the rear as well.

b. Windows: The house has four-over-four-light double-hung sash windows with simple architrave surrounds. They all have louvered shutters. There are eight bays across the front and rear (some rear first story bays obscured by additions) but no bays at the west side elevation and only one at the east.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house has a side gabled roof covered with wood shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The roof overhangs to the front, concealing a narrow boxed cornice but probably providing better wind break to second story windows.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Annual Reports of the Lighthouse Board,

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CAPE HATTERAS LIGHTHOUSE,  
DOUBLE KEEPER'S DWELLING  
HABS NO. NC-357-A (page 6)

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
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IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, Double Keeper's Quarters was part of the cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, chief and the Southeast Regional Office of the National Park Service, Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The WASO project leader was Paul Dolinsky, Principal Architect for HABS. Drawings were executed by: Frederick J. Lindstrom, Supervisory Architect HABS; Timothy A. Buehner, Architect HABS; Judith E. Collins, Architectural Technician, Auburn University; and Thomas P. Forde, Jr., Architectural Technician, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Large format photographs were taken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS Photographer. The historical report and bibliography was prepared by HABS Historian, Catherine C. Lavoie. The project was begun in September of 1989.